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ABSTRACT

Indonesia seems to be succeeding in its fight against illiteracy due to the choice of Bahasa Indonesia, a simple language, as the national language and as a unifying force. A literacy campaign is based on Package A, a group of 100 booklets. The main effort is to form groups that meet regularly and are taught by volunteer tutors. Many Package A booklets teach money-making skills, since women feel they can not join learning groups because they need that time to earn extra money. To put these skills into practice, a group can borrow money to use as working capital or to buy equipment. The structure to fight illiteracy is in place, and the political commitment and international support are there. Obstacles are older learners, lack of printed material, and holding students' attention. The whole literacy campaign hinges first on the tutors and second on the peniliks, field staff who supervise them. Incentives to motivate tutors include letting teachers earn credits toward promotion, competitions, and loans. Help with basic needs is provided to the poorest before attention is turned to learning. An effective way to break the continuous circle of neglect in which girls are trapped is to spend money on women's education, which is relatively inexpensive compared with other development investments and has the potential to transform society. More local libraries are planned to provide a plentiful supply of reading material to prevent people from slipping back into illiteracy. (YLB)

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In a Class of Their Own

David Wigg
Foreword by H. E. Dame R. Nita Barrow

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World Bank
Development
Essays

In a Class of Their Own

A Look at the Campaign against Female Illiteracy

If you educate a man you educate a person, but if you educate a woman you educate a family.

—Ruby Manikan
(Indian church leader)

David Wigg

Foreword by H. E. Dame R. Nita Barrow
Governor-General of Barbados

The World Bank
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Credits for photographs

All photographs in this booklet are by Carla Bianpoen. The cover shows a woman in Bogor, Java, who is learning to read and write.

The People behind This Essay

David Wigg has been a foreign correspondent for three London newspapers: *The Times, The Daily Telegraph,* and *The Independent.* He is now a writer-consultant at the World Bank. Carla Bianpoen, of the Bank's resident mission in Jakarta, accompanied David Wigg on his journey through Indonesia and acted as translator. Kathryn Kline Dahl edited the essay; Joyce C. Petruzzelli was the designer and typesetter. Additional support came from Michael Prest, manager of the World Bank Development Essays series; Alexander Shakow, former director of the Bank's External Affairs Department; Timothy Cullen, chief of the department's Media Team; and Ann Beasley, acting chief of the department's Creative Services Team. John Maxwell Hamilton, formerly of the Bank and now of Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, conceived the series.

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Foreword

The issue of female literacy has grown in prominence during the past two decades. This was indeed a natural outgrowth of the significant increase in educational opportunities witnessed in developing countries during the middle part of this century.

In the first part of this century, education had been fostered in many instances by churches through their missionary schools. The emphasis, however, was on educating boys and men. They were seen as the leadership group and as the family providers. Women's work in these areas went unrecognized.

During the 1950s and 1960s, again the emphasis was on programs that men needed. They were provided through either government or private means.

Women carried an inordinate burden, however, in relation to the support of the family and, by extension, the nation as a whole. Yet, when questions of educating them arose, the response was that resources were scarce, and if women received an education, they "would only get married." My own grandmother was one of those told that educating her two daughters to the same level as her four sons was a waste, especially as education was not free at that time. She replied that schooling her girls *was* important, for if they married they would appreciate the advantage of an education for their children.

The 1960s through the 1980s, with the growth of self-rule and democratic principles in many countries, brought change. The whole emphasis on family planning and women's rights opened new vistas. As countries struggled for gender equity and for recognition of women's role as vital, educational opportunities increased. The efforts in some countries to link literacy programs to people's everyday concerns implied a change of methodology. Women's interests are of necessity different from men's: in addition

to being vital members of the work force, women are the primary caretakers of the home and the family. When they are involved in planning their literacy programs, then learning becomes easier, for they know what they want.

It is not only in developing countries that illiteracy among women is high. Industrialized nations also have large numbers of illiterates, despite statistics that suggest otherwise. This World Bank Development Essay is therefore timely, offering insight into the causes of female illiteracy and highlighting the urgent need to teach basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. Most telling is the quotation from Ruby Manikan, a church leader in India: "If you educate a man you educate a person, but if you educate a woman you educate a family."

In this Year of the Family, allied to the 1990 Year of Literacy, it is hoped that eradicating female illiteracy will be given paramount emphasis.

H.E. Dame R. Nita Barrow
Government House, Barbados
August 1994

When his father died, he thought it meant he would have to leave school. He stood by the coffin and wept—not only for his father but also for himself.

His mother, who often regretted never learning to read or write, comforted him. "She told me she would send me to the highest school possible in the world," he recalled.

And she did. He went on to universities at home in Indonesia and afterward in the United States. Then he repaid her in his own way—by spending most of his professional life trying to eradicate illiteracy from his native land.

Dr. Washington Napitupulu told the story of his childhood with deep feeling, but it was difficult for him to be wistful for long; broad humor kept bursting through.

"I was born on the floor," he said suddenly.

His mother was standing up when she gave birth, and because the floor sloped, he rolled a full 3 meters away.

"My mother laughed and said, 'This boy might go somewhere in the future.'"

Dr. Napitupulu recently retired after seventeen years as Indonesia's director-general of nonformal education, youth, and sport. It's a long, formal title, and he's better known internationally simply as "the father of Indonesia's literacy campaign." Now he's attached to UNESCO, still involved with literacy, and working out of an office filled with plaques, mementos, and framed photographs, high in a Jakarta skyscraper.

When I left him after a lengthy talk, I walked out into the moist heat and then drove off slowly into the lines of traffic. I hadn't visited Jakarta for seven years, and, inevitably because of the city's growing wealth, there were now more skyscrapers—great glass buildings with cool, spacious,

spotlessly clean lobbies—and more fast-food restaurants, and fewer of the red tile–roofed houses and clumps of green that gave much of the city the feeling of an enlarged village.

Banks of dark clouds filled the sky; the warm rain slowed the traffic to a crawl. The Soviet-style monumental statues, put up during the dramatic and frantic years of President Sukarno's regime, looked more out of place than ever, now that Jakarta had become a wealthier and more self-confident city. With their outstretched arms and anguished expressions, the statues seemed to have nothing to do with subtle Indonesian culture. And nothing to do with Indonesia's unsung successes. Indonesians have proud stories to tell that have no need to be immortalized in stone: development achievements in family planning, in agriculture, and in literacy.

I was in Jakarta because every time I asked an expert which country I should visit to see a literacy campaign in action, the answer invariably was: "Indonesia's doing some interesting things." My journey, in March 1992, was to take me through Java and to the neighboring islands to the east—Bali, Lombok, and Sumbawa.

The Single Most Useful Act

When Indonesia declared its independence from the Netherlands in 1945 (although Dutch power would not crumble until a few years later), about 95 percent of the 70 million people were illiterate. The population now is about 185 million. Literacy statistics anywhere are notoriously unreliable. The figures depend on how one defines literacy, political leaders may inflate them to boast about progress, and villagers may brag to survey takers that they are literate even if they're not. But an official Indonesian estimate, made in 1985, was that about 20 percent of adults were still illiterate and about 70 percent of those were women. Current trends suggest further gains in literacy since then.

I wanted to look specifically at women's literacy because there's a body of evidence ("proving what anyone with a shred of common sense already knows," as one female colleague put it) that educating women is probably the single most useful act a developing nation can do to end poverty and misery. As Lawrence Summers, a former chief economist of the World Bank, has said, "Hard statistical evaluations fairly consistently find that female education is the variable most highly correlated with improvements in social indicators."

The same point was made by the team of international experts (including Dr. Napitupulu) who wrote the Statement of Ulan Bator in 1987 in preparation for International Literacy Year three years later. After declaring that there were 889 million illiterates worldwide, they asserted that helping illiterate women is crucial. Women are the ones who, after giving birth, not only look after and teach their children but also do most of the productive work in the countryside.

Dr. Napitupulu, the "father of Indonesia's literacy campaign"

Real Achievements

The task facing Indonesia remains immense, but its achievements in educating its population are real. It has been awarded literacy prizes such as UNESCO's in 1982, for a campaign built on what is called Package A, a series of 100 illustrated booklets carefully designed to teach basic literacy. The country proudly celebrates International Literacy Day every year on September 8. And Indonesia's government ministers are confident and optimistic about the future.

In December 1991 Fuad Hassan, the Minister of Education and Culture, announced that there were only 3.6 million illiterates of both sexes between the ages of 7 and 44. The next two-year campaign would focus on them. Almost 100

percent of children had received some formal education, Hassan said, and "the main problem we are facing is no longer basic literacy and universalization of primary education but how to improve the quality." Jesper Morch, a Dane who works for UNICEF, which has long been a partner in the anti-illiteracy campaign, echoes this view. He believes that "by 1995 everyone below 44 will be literate, and by 2000 you'll be able to say that illiteracy is gone."

For more than two decades—beginning when President Suharto took over the government in 1965—Indonesia was immersed in its own affairs, determined to solve its own problems. But now, in the wake of the Soviet Union's breakup, it is the world's fourth most populous nation (after China, India, and the United States). The time has come, it believes, to play a greater role both regionally and internationally, and its foreign friends agree.

Some Basic Questions

Indonesia grapples, as do other countries, with some fundamental questions when it comes to literacy—questions I wanted to look into on my journey. If your people speak many languages, do you insist on having one "national" language and risk the charge of cultural insensitivity and possible political upheaval? And how do you choose which language that is to be? Do you teach basic literacy in the national or the local language?

In the absence of a tough, authoritarian government, how do you push through a literacy program? Less authoritarian governments, like Indonesia's, can't require illiterates to present themselves in the classrooms, nor can they order platoons of educated citizens to fan out into the towns and countryside and teach. They must devise gentler methods.

How, then, does a country motivate its citizens to participate in literacy programs? Can it rely purely on the consciences of volunteer tutors, or must it pay people to teach? If it relies on volunteers, how does it keep these tutors tutoring? And how does it persuade illiterates of both sexes, who are probably working sixteen hours a day at back-

breaking labor, that it's all worthwhile, that they really must keep their heads in their booklets? And why is it so hard for adults to learn to read, whereas children seem to pick it up so quickly?

When it comes to female literacy, is there some male prejudice to be overcome? Wouldn't some men rather keep women unschooled and passive? Do men fear that they will lose some of their advantages, that society will become unstable, uncertain, less traditional if women become literate and then well-educated?

"A Brilliant Decision"

Nations that have no real dispute over language are lucky. Thailand, which is largely homogeneous and never had to grapple with a leftover colonial language, is Asia's obvious example. India, however, with its many languages, still squabbles about whether Hindi or English should be its lingua franca, mainly because Southern Indians don't want to give the advantage to the Hindi-speaking North.

Indonesia's languages are estimated to number between 150 and 400, some being regional dialects of the same language. The government decided that the national language should be Bahasa Indonesia, a variant of Malay, rather than Javanese, the language of the largest and most politically powerful group. Keeping Dutch was never a serious option, and Dutch is now heard only occasionally on the lips of the older, and usually well-educated, generation.

Bahasa Indonesia, which has the advantage of being a relatively simple language, was to be a unifying force for the different peoples living in a country that stretches over 3,000 miles and is made up of more than 13,000 islands. It has done this, although in villages throughout Java, for example, the daily talk continues to be in Sundanese, Javanese, or Madurese.

Choosing Bahasa Indonesia as the national language was a "brilliant decision" politically, as one outsider commented, but it makes the task of teaching literacy more

difficult. The definition of literacy, of course, varies from place to place. In some countries, a woman is considered literate if she can merely read the letters of the alphabet; in other counties, she must be able to master a text of a certain length; in countries with high educational standards, illiterates are those who cannot complete a complicated questionnaire or understand written instructions that contain technical language. In Indonesia, literacy is defined as knowing the Latin alphabet and Arabic numerals and being able to read magazines, newspapers, and booklets in Bahasa Indonesia, to write simple personal and official letters, and to work out basic sums such as the interest on a loan.

The debate about whether to teach in Bahasa Indonesia or in local languages still rumbles on. Bahasa Indonesia is the "high status" language, and people usually want to learn to read in the language with high status, said one foreign literacy expert. Attempts to teach people in their native tongue sometimes backfire; people see themselves as being marginalized.

Anwas Iskandar heads the Directorate of Community Education (Dikmas for short), which organizes the literacy campaign in each of the twenty-seven provinces. As so often happens when Indonesians gather and want to break the ice, he started our first meeting by gently teasing his junior officials—Javanese and Madurese in this case—about their origins. He himself is Sundanese, and, he said sadly, the traditional Sundanese songs that he learned in his youth were not understood by his own son. They had to be translated for him. Iskandar believes that literacy classes should first be taught in the local languages, but he said that offical policy is still to teach in Bahasa Indonesia.

But it's now far too late to change to local languages, most people I talked to agreed. "It could have been done twenty years ago," UNICEF's Jesper Morch argued, "but not now." However, there are some exceptions. In East Timor—the former Portuguese colony was integrated into Indonesia in 1976 but remains a sensitive issue between the two countries—classes are now started in the local language.

The East Timorese would rather be left to themselves, Morch said, but they accept that the younger generation should be literate. Another problem, he added, is that the East Timorese are clannish and live in isolated communities. "If you put a gun to their heads, they wouldn't sit down in some literacy classes. They'd walk four hours to be with their own clan for a class, rather than sit down with another clan."

Respect for Authority

Dr. Napitupulu calls Indonesia's respect for authority its greatest strength and the main reason why the country seems to be succeeding in its fight against illiteracy. "In the whole of Indonesia there's still the culture of looking up. The boss says so; we do it," he explained.

The country's social system, similar to those in other Southeast Asian nations, is one based on ties between patrons and clients. The Indonesians call it *bapakism,* or paternalism. The leader, whether in the family, in the village, or in the central government, assumes responsibility for those under him, and they in return owe him a debt.

As Karl D. Jackson, a scholar who has written extensively on Indonesian political behavior, put it, the country's political integration "depends on a system of traditional authority relations animating village social life and connecting each village with the world of regional and national politics.... The villages are coherent units under the leadership of their headmen."

These highly organized communities and the seriousness with which the headmen take their responsibilities mean that "you have a delivery system when it comes to organizing a literacy campaign," said Roslyn Hees, a World Bank economist with experience in Indonesia.

Paternalism is criticized by those who believe strongly in individual effort, but many experts agree that it is an advantage when conducting a literacy campaign. Power from Jakarta reaches out to all corners of the country, and

Dikmas has an impressive network, commented UNICEF's Jesper Morch. The traditional respect for authority, the non-questioning of orders, helps development programs. If someone in power says it is important to be a tutor, then people will become tutors. "In Latin America," Morch added, "they will question authority; in Indonesia they don't."

And this great respect for authority, this deference, is doubly true among women. Indeed, it got in the way of my interviews at first when I questioned women about why they were illiterate, why they wanted to learn, and what made it difficult for them to do so.

A Formal Session in Bogor

The first stop on my journey was an assembly hall in Bogor, about an hour's fast drive from Jakarta. Some sixty women had been brought in from surrounding villages to meet me. The session was formal (the glasses of tea had tin lids on them), and there were florid speeches of welcome and thanks. It was flattering and well-orchestrated, a theatrical introduction to village formalities. But for finding anything out, it was almost useless.

A number of Dikmas officials from Jakarta and Bogor sat at the head table with me and Carla Bianpoen, a World Bank staff member who served as my interpreter during the journey. The women came up one at a time, some in yellow head scarves, and all—young and old—looking immaculate. They had the tough experience of publicly answering questions that were then translated from Bahasa Indonesia into English. They smiled, they were polite, they were gracious—but they weren't going to talk much about themselves in front of such a large and intimidating assembly.

Aca, 30 years old and the mother of two, wanted to be literate so she could learn accounting and help her sewing business. Iin, 46, had dropped out of school because her home was too far away. If she had had a bicycle she would have continued. Her husband was literate (he had taught

her a little), and so were her four children, which is why she was determined to learn. Aang, 26, also dropped out of school because of a lack of transport.

The session ended with some singing, more speeches, a group photograph (with myself in the place of honor holding a grave-faced child on my knee), and handshaking all round. ("In Indonesia, all is ceremony," I had been told again and again.) Everyone was included and made to feel important. Everyone behaved with the modesty and refinement and control that distinguishes most Indonesians.

Determined learners in the Bogor group

This control—both political and social—makes it easier for the government to provide a network of social services. It's difficult for anything to happen here, a foreigner said, without someone learning about it and reporting upward. Other countries that don't have this network or this social system can't copy the way Indonesia organizes its literacy campaign.

Dr. Napitupulu once went to Pakistan to explain how his ideas of getting everyone to cooperate worked. After his speech, a politically powerful Pakistani woman whispered to him, "In this country we can't do that."

"Why, madam?" he asked.

"In this country everyone is for himself. Everyone is for herself. Too egotistical here. The people think of themselves only. If they want to do something for you, they ask, 'How much do I get?'"

Dr. Napitupulu, quickly being diplomatic, admitted to her that in Indonesia, too, such an attitude was appearing, especially in the cities, but the government was trying to fight it.

A Campaign Based on 100 Booklets

In 1964 President Sukarno formally declared that illiteracy was eradicated—a statement that Dr. Napitupulu profoundly disagreed with. He knew well what was happening in the villages. It was obvious that many millions were still illiterate, and many with some schooling had lapsed back into illiteracy. When he accosted an official about this, the reply was, "Well, we do still have some illiterates, but never mind."

After he was promoted to director-general of nonformal education, youth, and sport in 1974 and given charge of the literacy campaign, Dr. Napitupulu showed that he minded very much. He decided that the teaching books were "too abstract." With advice from other government agencies and women's and youth groups, he created Package A. He was influenced by Phillip Coombs, who, as vice chairman of the International Council for Educational Development, wrote a report in 1973 on how nonformal education could help defeat rural poverty. The main targets of Indonesia's campaign are illiterates between the ages of 7 and 44. They've never been to school or they've dropped out. But of course, Dr. Napitupulu said, those over 44 shouldn't be ignored and are also included in all parts of the campaign.

The package is a simple idea. The first group of the 100 booklets—A1 to A20—contains basic lessons in reading, writing, and arithmetic, with the level of difficulty increasing gradually. The booklets in the next group—A21 to A60—are all on a similar reading level and discuss such subjects as "Awaiting the Birth of a Baby," "Common Diseases," and "Raising Rabbits." The final booklets—A61 to A100—are more difficult than the previous ones and cover a wider range of subjects, such as "Taxes," "Musical Instruments," and "National Heroes."

Students can teach themselves with Package A or get help from a friend or family member, but the main effort

is to form groups that meet regularly and are taught by volunteer tutors. There's a final test, which only a small percentage of students get around to taking, and a final certificate for the successful. A more advanced Package B is being researched and tested, in preparation for moving the campaign beyond basic literacy to the equivalent of a lower secondary education. Nine regional learning and resource centers administer, train, evaluate, and issue materials.

A Tolerant Religious Climate

Indonesia is home to more Muslims than any other nation in the world, but its approach to Islam is less rigid than that of more traditional Muslim countries. Indonesians and foreigners alike consider this an advantage to the literacy campaign. Some regions are exceptions, such as Aceh in the north of Sumatra, where Islam first gained its foothold in the thirteenth century and where today it's practiced with strictness. But in other parts of Indonesia, Islam is more tolerant and worldly, and underneath lie relics, often exposed, of former Hindu, Buddhist, and animist beliefs. And Pancasila, the national philosophy—a purposely vague set of beliefs in God, unity, humanitarianism, democracy, and social justice—is seen, particularly by minorities, as a barrier against the creation of an Islamic state.

Dr. Napitupulu noted that despite this widespread tolerance, some religious leaders had resisted the literacy campaign. He had heard that in one area, the hajji (someone who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca) asked the learners, "Why do you have to learn that Package A? If you learn that, there's no guarantee that you'll go to heaven. So you had better learn the Koran." In fact, the successful literacy campaign in Aceh Province took just that approach. Tutors first introduced their students to Arabic characters by using verses from the Koran; then they moved to Package A.

Teaching Money-Making Skills

How do you get the women, usually overloaded with hard physical work as well as looking after a family, to make the effort to sit in a class, say, twice a week for two hours each time? "After they finish working in the field, they would come home and take a bath," Dr. Napitupulu had explained. "They eat and then go and chat. Now we said let's use that chatting time with neighbors as a learning group activity. So we organized it. We used the leisure time they had, to help them learn."

Then some women decided they couldn't join in because they needed that time to make something, like mats or belts, to earn extra money. Many of the Package A booklets tried to address that problem by teaching money-making skills. But groups became frustrated when they didn't have the resources to put these skills into practice. So, Dr. Napitupulu said, "I had to push them again." A group would be lent money—6,000 rupiahs ($3) per member—to use as working capital or to buy some simple equipment such as a sewing machine.

Itoh at work on a belt

The group was supposed to save from its profits and pass the savings on to new groups of women. But that part has not worked well. Only about 20 percent of the money seems to be revolving on to new groups. And the scheme has its critics. A lecturer in psychology at the University of Indonesia thought the money-making ventures were started without being properly planned. Women might do some sewing and then find no market for their product. An Indonesian educational consultant dis-

missed the sums of money lent as so small as to be almost useless.

But there have been success stories. Near Yogyakarta in central Java, the next stop on my journey, I heard one from Itoh. She sat on an old car seat in the courtyard of her house in Kampong Ngaglik, sewing white thread along each side of a belt. On the whitewashed walls was a portrait of President Suharto. Some scratching noises came from a bird cage hanging from a beam, too high up to see the occupant. Two blue plastic toy tennis rackets lay where they had fallen on the concrete floor; Itoh had two boys and was now hoping for a daughter. A long line of washing that had been hung up to dry blocked out most of the sun's rays.

Holding the belt firmly on a piece of wood wedged between her knees, she worked adroitly. Her fingers had hurt at first when she started, but now "I am used to it," she said. The men in the village cut out the strips of leather and put on the buckles. The finished belts would be sent off to be sold in Jakarta or Surabaya. Itoh could complete ten belts a day, sometimes twenty if she felt like it. She made 100 rupiahs (5¢) a belt, but didn't really have time to meet the demand, she said.

The next settlement I visited, Kampong Ponggalan, was like the first—luxuriant and seemingly content with itself. Banana trees and coconut palms threw down plenty of shade. A paved road divided the properties, and flowers grew everywhere. White concrete fences and ornate railings surrounded some of the houses. At the entrance to the village, by the side of the road, a newspaper had been nailed to a notice board that was carefully protected by glass from the rains. I suddenly understood why so many writers became excited when visiting Javanese villages. They were enchanted worlds, as V. S. Naipaul wrote, "where everything—food, houses, tools, rituals, reverences—had evolved over the centuries and had reached a kind of perfection."

Masiyem Nurhadi had started what looked like a very prosperous *emping* business. Her Package A class of ten had been lent 60,000 rupiahs ($30), and she was hard at work inside her house, squatting on the rough floor and banging

small fruit into *emping*—flat pancakes that are eaten as snacks. The fruit was first heated over a fire that crackled in a giant bowl. She needed the money, she said, to send her two sons to school. A daughter had already dropped out.

Obstacles and Perseverance

The weaknesses and the pitfalls of the literacy campaign are apparent at every turn and acknowledged by both Indonesians and foreign experts. Not enough effort is made to recruit the poorest of the poor. There have been problems in managing the revolving funds. The *peniliks* (as the field supervisory staff are called) have too many learners to watch over, too-vast areas to cover, and inadequate expense accounts for travel. Some unpaid volunteer tutors become dispirited and give up. The more remote areas such as East Nusa Tenggara and Irian Jaya don't get enough attention.

Any war against mass illiteracy seems at times endless, and some begin to doubt whether it can ever really be won. But in Indonesia, at least the structure to fight the campaign is in place, and so are many dedicated teachers and administrators. The political commitment is certainly there, and so is the international support. It's now a question of holding on and never letting go.

The determination and consistency of the Indonesian government, not only in literacy campaigns but in all areas of education, have been the vital ingredients in achieving such good overall results since the economic and social chaos of the mid-1960s. The World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department, its independent assessor, called the effort "one of the most significant educational transformations seen in the developing world in recent times."

The World Bank itself played no small part. The size of its lending portfolio—about $1.5 billion since 1969—has made it the largest single external supplier of funds for Indonesian education. In no other country has there been a sectoral lending program of such size. When it comes specifically to nonformal education, the World Bank approved loans in

1977 and 1984 totaling about $58 million. In December 1991 it approved a third loan of $69.5 million.

The difficulties of teaching adults to be literate should never be underestimated; adult literacy programs worldwide have, on the whole, been disappointing. It is one of those puzzles, as Helen Abadzi, a World Bank educational psychologist put it, that defy common sense. Support for literacy programs virtually disappeared from World Bank projects after a discouraging review in 1987, she said, but many governments, usually for political and social reasons, kept asking the World Bank for help. And the Conference on Education for All, held in Thailand in 1990, revived many experts' determination to keep going. The Bank is now preparing or financing projects not only in Indonesia but also in Bangladesh, Ghana, and Uganda.

A Challenge for Older Learners

Children seem to learn to read relatively easily. So, surely, all one has to do is put adults back in the classroom, and they will also learn. But it's not as simple as that.

Most children, Helen Abadzi explained, take a little time to learn the reading strategy, but from a certain point on, there's a rapid increase in reading speed. Reading eventually becomes effortless and automatic. "I think that adults don't get to that stage as easily," she said. "They pick up the reading strategy faster, and they can learn their letters perhaps more easily, but somehow their speed doesn't take off. Because they read slowly and with effort, their attention is taken up with the print and they have no attention left to devote to comprehension. Therefore reading is a hassle. And if it's a hassle, you're not likely to do it. If you don't do it, you lapse into illiteracy." She concluded, "I'm afraid that as people grow up, brain organization changes in such a way that immediate word recognition becomes increasingly difficult. Pattern recognition becomes less and less efficient."

Abadzi, whose native tongue is Greek, speaks "only" ten languages but has studied seventeen. She started learning

Hebrew and Hindi as an adult—between the ages of 19 and 22—and found reading quite slow. "I learned the letters easily," she said, "but I never took off at speed. I do not see patterns in those scripts, I see individual letters. I used to believe that I have some sort of dyslexia, until I found that most foreign, fluent speakers I met did worse than I. And I see in adult illiterates some of the same things that I saw in myself." And how do you get adult illiterates to read patterns? More research is still needed, she said, to try to find an answer to that.

Abadzi is faced with the daunting task of developing a project to make 19 million Bangladeshis literate by the year 2000. Because teenagers are more likely to rapidly recognize patterns, she is concentrating on them. But that does not mean that adults should be excluded. "I believe that literacy is a civil right," she said. "We can focus on adolescents, try to make sure they stay in class, but we have no right to exclude anybody."

Holding Students' Attention

Adults may be much more difficult to teach—they have also probably been working for sixteen hours on any day—but you must find innovative ways to reach them. To get their attention, Abadzi believes in the same strategies preached by Dr. Napitupulu: use material that is relevant to their lives and give them incentives.

"I bet," Abadzi remarked with a smile, "you can do a beautiful job in catching young illiterate rickshaw wallahs by using pornographic literature. They will stay in class and learn to read." That was an extreme example, she said, and not something that governments would be interested in. Nevertheless, it illustrated the importance of finding material that fits with the particular interests of individuals. One missionary in Bangladesh, for example, taught some illiterates during their first lesson how to write a letter to their uncles asking for money. That caught their attention and was certainly highly utilitarian.

All sorts of schemes are devised to keep students in class. A nongovernmental organization in Bangaldesh, for example, gives out shirts or soap to street children once a month; this has proved effective in preventing the students from dropping out. The most well thought-out incentives are those such as Dr. Napitupulu's income-generating schemes, which tie literacy to earning a living. Helen Abadzi thinks those kinds of elaborate projects are wonderful and should be supported by lending and aid agencies, but she warns that they are complicated and difficult to implement (as the Indonesians are finding) and may end up serving only a very few people.

As for the effects literacy has on women's lives, Abadzi said that it tends to give them power, and in traditional societies, men may feel threatened by this. When she was in Yemen, a university graduate in English literature told her that when he married he wanted his wife to be illiterate. If she was illiterate, he explained, she wouldn't argue with him about anything. "In some societies," Abadzi said, "men don't rely on their wives for friendship or business partnerships. They have male relatives for that. Therefore they do not see literacy as an asset for their wives."

Helping Those Who Fall through the Cracks

Everyone seemed to have heard of Romo Mangun. The man painting secondhand tires black to make them look like new, the university student lolling on the grass, the tatterdemalion street vendor—all nodded and murmured, "Ah yes, Romo Mangun." They knew he lived somewhere in that neighborhood of Yogyakarta but not exactly where. The best directions we received were to take a narrow turning near the "foto copier" sign.

Romo Mangun is an Indonesian Catholic priest, an architect, a man of letters, and occasionally a bit of a thorn in the government's side. He helps the poorest of the poor, those who have fallen through the cracks. He designed his own house, with a series of stairs and walkways leading in

all directions and well-positioned slatted windows that keep the breezes blowing gently through. It has the feel of a tree house—a bit precarious and temporary and ethereal. The stairs, the floor, and the bamboo furniture seem as if they might give way if you step or sit too heavily.

Mangun's long white hair fell over his ears, and he had a small white beard and mustache. He wore thick spectacles. A soft, slow smile frequently crossed his face. He was too old now to continue as an architect, he said, and was freed from all ecclesiastical duties. This allowed him to give 100 percent of his time to the needy, and he was trying to use less conventional methods for teaching poor children. "The first victims in the slums are the children," he said.

Romo Mangun, an advocate for the poor

What did he think about Package A and the government's literacy campaign? "The approach is too scholastic," he answered. "The system's built on the world of the school, not the world of the kampong. In schools you have a teacher, a blackboard, books, benches. It's splendid and good for schools. But for the kampong it's something strange—it's not appropriate. People have the feeling that this is something difficult. 'I can't understand,' they say. In a kampong you talk freely. 'Books are something too high,' they say, 'so not for me.'"

"They have to have the self-confidence," he continued, "that these things are not too high for them. Books should be left for later on. I tell students who go to teach, 'Don't teach them. Play with them. Makes jokes with them. Use common objects like toothpaste as teaching aids, not books at first.'"

In all societies, there are educational radicals who want to teach experimentally or less formally. Indonesia is now, it seems, a confident enough society to make room for those who are a bit unorthodox.

"What about the girls?" I asked. "Is a different approach needed for them?"

"We found that the girls are smarter than the boys," Mangun replied, with that soft smile again. "In our society boys are princes, so a boy can do anything. But girls have all sorts of duties—they have learned responsibility from early childhood. The boys are playboys. The work's done by the women. The formal leader is the man, but the leader of the work is the woman. In seminars the girls don't take the initiative—they let the boys ask the questions."

But did he feel that Indonesia was moving forward in the fight against illiteracy? The statistics suggested so.

"I don't trust statistics," Mangun said. "Children tend to learn here by heart, rather than really reading and understanding something. The headmen in the villages often put up boards that say 'No illiteracy here,' but it's not the reality. There is progress here," he admitted, "but how much progress is, for me, still a mystery."

Two hours later, we scrambled down the bank of the river that flows through Yogyakarta to see one of Romo Mangun's slum projects. In the muddy brown, fast-flowing river, a gang of naked boys hurled each other around. Above them, cars and trucks spewed out fumes as they crossed a highway bridge. The steep slope of the bank was covered with simple shacks, some perched on platforms. The stench was overpowering. In one shack an old woman sat surrounded by heaps of used computer paper, which she was meticulously trying to straighten out and arrange in piles. As in most slums, the families had tried to make life better, with a colorful splash of paint on an outside wall, a plant hanging from a string, a bright poster covering a gaping hole.

A man in shorts and a T-shirt emerged; he was the deputy headman. His eyes were full of sleep. The squatters—there were thirty-six families in his group—were from all parts of Indonesia, he said. They had traveled first to Jakarta to look for work, but the authorities were in the midst of a "clean-up campaign" and had transported them to Yogyakarta, where they were stranded.

Most of the women were out working in the city. But yes, he said, eager to impress, they did hold literacy classes. He realized their importance. At the start, they were held once every week, but that had now slipped to once every two weeks. He looked slightly apologetic.

Using Games

We sat around the Dikmas office in Yogyakarta. There was no air conditioning, and the air was heavy with moisture. Suyono, a Javanese from the Jakarta Dikmas staff, immaculately dressed as always, spread a board game over the table, pushing aside the debris of the juice and cakes we'd been enjoying.

"This is a simulation game," he explained, an approach used all over the country to get a group involved in reading and thinking. It looked like a very simplified version of Monopoly, with players moving tokens in steps round the outside of the board.

If you landed on certain squares, you had to pick up a card and answer a question. "A man working in the field," one of the cards read, "always makes time to have dinner with his wife and children. This is a habit we should follow. Why?"

"In a village," read another, "there's a meeting to talk about roads and bridge building. One villager doesn't attend because, he argues, whatever the outcome is he'd agree with it. What do you think about this kind of attitude?" Players who had studied booklets A11 to A100 in Package A should have had no trouble replying. Even those who hadn't studied could probably come up with a worthy answer and save face.

In the middle of the board were additional piles of cards with general-knowledge questions. "Name three holidays of the Hindu religion," read one of them.

The corner squares were special. Players landing on one of these would not go directly to jail, as in Monopoly; instead they would have to get up and do something. "Such as?" I asked.

"Dance, perhaps, or sing," replied Suyono, with a slight smile, looking as if he would enjoy landing on that square and performing. I later discovered why: he had a melodious tenor voice. Driving me into his hometown of Solo (also known as Surakarta), he softly crooned a ballad about the river that flows through the city and the intense beauty of the moon that is sometimes reflected in it.

The New Urban Woman

In the most popular restaurant in town, the Boga, the young elite of Solo were celebrating someone's birthday. They began a surprisingly stately dance. In couples and with serious faces, they paraded along a central space through the tables, the waiters moving aside to let them pass. The leading couple stopped and made an archway with their arms for the next couple to duck through. The procession eventually found itself outside the restaurant, where it regrouped and returned to repeat the performance.

But this was only a temporary lapse into the past—some humoring, perhaps, of a parent who was picking up the tab and remembered with pleasure the old ways—and soon the couples were shaking and twisting to universal rock like their yuppie contemporaries in the rest of "getting-rich-quick" Southeast Asia. These young women had no doubts about their status and their future.

"The modern Indonesian urban woman is very international and ambitious," said Dessy Anwar, one of the country's new breed of television reporters, whom I met later in Sumbawa. She worked for the channel Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia in Jakarta and talked excitedly, again and again pushing her hair away from her face, about how television was expanding in Indonesia. Given Indonesia's size, television has become essential for keeping the widespread archipelago unified.

At present, television is bland and uninspiring for the most part (it also plays little part in teaching literacy). One exception, however, seems to have been a soap opera called

"Sartika," which was about a female doctor who goes to work in a remote region. At first the villagers are reluctant to be treated by a woman, but soon, of course, they want only her. She eventually marries another doctor, overcoming objections from his mother because of Sartika's lower social background.

In a village in central Java, I asked Endang, a 26-year-old woman who dropped out of school and was struggling to become literate, whether she had a TV and, if so, what she watched.

She said she watched the "dramas" and she watched "Sartika," and then, with gathering flair, she narrated the plot at some length. Other women prompted her along the way, while some of the male officials, who also admitted to watching the program, nodded and smiled in recognition.

"Would you," my interpreter Carla asked, "like your 6-year-old daughter to be like Dr. Sartika?" There was no doubt. "Definitely," Endang said with a new firmness in her voice.

So many women who at first seemed unsure of themselves would suddenly show similar flashes of strength. It was as if they were just waiting for the moment to break out into a different and more varied world.

"There's nothing to stop talented women from getting to the top, and it's still helpful to have had some foreign experience," Dessy Anwar said. Not only her accent but her confidence and straightforwardness—so unlike the traditional Indonesian woman's deference to males—revealed many years of living and studying in Britain. Women with her experience and her background—she comes from an academic family—are finding no male prejudice in the fight for top jobs, she said. The way to rise in Indonesian society is through money and connections. It matters little any more if the person, man or woman, is *kasar*—rough in manners. Cash and whom you know are what count, according to Anwar.

Dessy Anwar's internationalism and ambition are still atypical, although Indonesia likes to boast about the strong, independent women in its past. One of the nation's hero-

ines is Raden Adjeng Kartini, who, in letters to friends published in 1911 under the title *From Darkness to Light,* championed the cause of education for Indonesian women. She died at the early age of 25, and her portrait now graces one of the country's bank notes.

The Exploited Woman

The affluent urban woman in Indonesia, like her counterpart in the industrial world, may be struggling with the decision about whether to compete professionally with men or be a homemaker, but most of Indonesia's women don't have that choice. Most of them "are not overprotected but rather overburdened," in the words of Dr. Napitupulu again.

"In North Sumatra where I was born," he reminisced, "when you plant the rice, the women do that. When you clean the rice fields, the women do it. They also build the roads, the houses, and carry stones from the river. The men are in the shops playing chess, drinking beer or coffee. The women, especially in North Sumatra, in Java, in Bali, often work harder than the men in the rural areas." A professional woman in Jakarta put it more dramatically: "The Indonesian woman is a working woman. In rural areas, everyone works or everyone dies." One foreigner was blunter: "Of all groups, women are the most conspicuously exploited here."

Women in Indonesia are still expected to play more traditional roles, according to researchers at the Centre for Population and Manpower Studies at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences. Among the Batak people in Sumatra, they reported, "the boys have a higher status than girls. If a family has three little girls, the relations from both sides of the family or the neighbors always try to soothe the father by saying: 'Be patient, keep praying. One day God is going to give you a child.'"

The researchers also reported that Javanese women are encouraged to view the duties of wife and mother as the main tasks for women. A local saying goes: "The wife has to follow her husband to either heaven or hell."

We drove eastward out of Solo, the distant peaks of volcanoes appearing hazy and unthreatening on the horizon. Parched and stiff, we stopped at a roadside shack for a drink. The owner, in stained shirt and torn shorts, sliced off the tops of coconuts with a dirty knife, jammed in ice cubes and straws, and then presented them grandly as if he were a beach waiter at a high-priced resort.

When we arrived in Magetan, a small town in East Java, some bricklayers were building a wall behind the Dikmas office. A mound of cement was slapped down with some flamboyance, a new brick haphazardly pressed into place. The wall already looked as if it might be in need of some structural adjustment. The countryside behind the workers was breathtaking. Dark green rice fields swept slightly upward to a line of trees on the horizon. The sky was misty and ragged, filled with rain clouds waiting to burst.

Two women, wives of the bricklayers, were doing all the really hard work. They picked up planks of wood and moved them from one side of the site to the other. And they did this again and again. They were friendly at first, almost coquettish. But when the questions started, they became suspicious, and finally, when the men moved onto the scene to find out what was going on, they demanded money for the answers. The women made 2,500 rupiahs ($1.25) a day, while their husbands made 3,500 rupiahs ($1.75).

Not only do women have to do hard physical work, they also still risk their lives when they get pregnant. Some sad statistics emerged from the Ministry of Health while I was in Indonesia. Although infant mortality has dropped substantially, the ratio of mothers dying in childbirth remained unchanged from 1987 to 1991 at 450 deaths per 100,000 women. Some died from infections because village midwives used bamboo slivers to cut the umbilical cord; others died from hemorrhaging because they were anemic. Anemia is a common problem among Indonesian women, who tend to give their share of meat to their husbands and children and rely on a low-protein diet of vegetables and rice. "The priority person in our family system is the husband because

it is believed that he needs the energy to earn the money," the ministry said. A health worker suggested a more general reason for the high maternal mortality rate: poverty and low literacy among women.

Classes Boost Confidence

Most of the men—local officials and passersby—gossiped outside the classroom in Magetan and occasionally dropped in to give the benefit of their wisdom to the female tutor. The group didn't usually meet at that time but had been asked to get together because of our arrival. They were working on booklet A-22, "Religions and Faith in Indonesia," which urges Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and people of other beliefs to live together happily under Pancasila. I asked some of the women to read from certain pages in A-29, "Healthy Food," which they did quickly and confidently. Suyono gently asked them questions about the passages to see if they understood what they were reading. They all passed the "test."

Carla and I talked to a few of the women outside, while Suyono, crouching on the floor, continued to teach the students. He was playing a game with them, and every now and then gusts of laughter spilled out into the street.

The literacy class in Magetan

Once outside the classroom, the women began to talk more freely. Kademi was a 40-year-old who seemed at first to be rather ordinary. She was conservatively dressed and held a white handkerchief with a green border, nervously twisting it round and round. But her thinking was more progressive than her appearance would suggest.

She had dropped out of school to look after her brothers and sisters, then had married and produced three sons. Her husband was a farmer who could read and write, but Kademi wanted those skills for herself. So she had enrolled in literacy classes, taking six years to get as far as booklet A-29. She could now read a newspaper, and she also liked to listen to religious lectures and Indonesian opera on the radio. The classes had certainly given her confidence, and she said she would like to take further specialized courses, perhaps something to do with health. Even if it meant having to travel to another town? "Yes," she said. "My husband would allow it."

Wati was much younger and more animated and had obviously benefited enormously from the government's literacy campaign. Her father hadn't been able to afford to keep her in school, and she dropped out in the first year of primary education. She had married at 17 and now, at the age of 25, had one son. "I want to learn more so that I can help my son," she said. She's now able to read and write and assist him with his homework. Outgoing and with the flair of an urban woman, Wati explained that one of the lessons in Package A—on etiquette—had also taught her how to deal with quarrels she used to have with her husband. And he was now learning from her, asking her questions every time she returned from a class.

"Why doesn't he join your literacy class?" I asked.

"It's all women," she replied. "He would only go to an all-male group."

Muslim men don't want to study with women, Dr. Napitupulu had explained. They don't mix when they go to the mosque, so they don't want to mix in classes. They felt shame about being labeled "illiterate," which the women didn't. They would feel even more shame if they went to a mixed group and found that some of the women were more advanced than they were. "The old idea that man is superior to woman is still there," he had said with a shrug.

Women of Bali

In Hindu Bali, I was told, I would find that relations between men and women were more relaxed and that mixed groups were common. We drove from Magetan to Surabaya, Indonesia's second largest city—a no-nonsense, bustling place—and from there flew the short hop to Bali. I had been to Bali before, but the visual impact was just as intense as the first time. So many Balinese had spent so much time for so many decades creating beautiful things that the eye was constantly excited.

Driving round a bend in the road, we were suddenly met with a splash of colors—red and yellow flowering bushes perfectly arranged. An elderly lady, walking as if she were in some honor ceremony, held high a bright red umbrella. And everywhere stood statues and pieces of sculpture: squat gods, serpents, towering gateposts. Bali, like Jakarta, has its heroic monumental statues—a figure in agony with a bandaged head and a gun clutched in hand—but somehow the Balinese make them less intrusive.

"Are Balinese women different from Javanese women?" I asked Ida Ayu Wiradi, a Dikmas official who drove with us north from Denpasar through central Bali to Bangli.

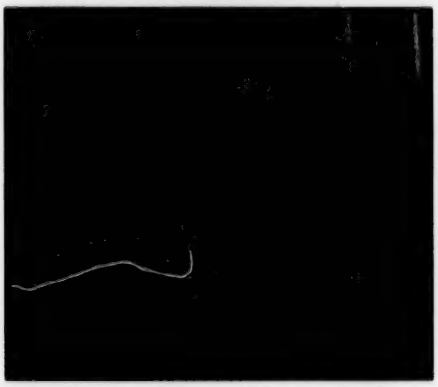
"We are more open," she said. "Quicker to accept change."

"And is life as hard here as it seems to be for rural women in Java?"

The Hindu women of Bali had extra work, she replied. They were always busy, every day, preparing food and flowers as offerings to the gods. In the villages there were so many places for offerings. "I do it myself," she said softly. "And in my work," she added, revealing the inner toughness that seems to lie just below the surface in so many Indonesian women, "I never allow myself not to do something because I am a woman."

We waited in the office of the director of education and culture for that district. He was at a reception but was coming right over. Trophies and flags festooned the shelves and walls.

Wayan Diutha was a man of great dignity and quiet deliberation. He wore a crisp white tunic with two pens in the top pocket, a bright green sarong, and a brown turban with a red flower in it. A gold ring gleamed on his left hand.



Wayan Diutha, a believer in equal education for both sexes

According to the law, there is no difference between a man's education and a woman's, he explained grandly. Women have the same intelligence as men. Naturally they should be equally educated, because how could they educate their children otherwise? Men in Bali, Diutha insisted, felt no shame if they were illiterate. And they felt no shame if they joined a mixed literacy class. When a man married, he might go to live in his wife's house, and, if so, she remained head of the house. "The Balinese are humble people," he said.

The Tutors and the Field Inspectors

The whole literacy campaign, everybody agreed, obviously hinged first on the tutors, who do the actual hard work in the classes, and second on the *peniliks*, the field staff who supervise them. It's very hard to motivate the tutors, Dr. Napitupulu had admitted. He wanted to keep the volunteer spirit going. "If the volunteer spirit is gone," he said, "then the whole ideology of this country is gone. Because Pancasila is based on the volunteer spirit."

As would be expected from someone who was also an educational psychologist, one cunning argument he would use with a prospective tutor went something like this: "You're an elementary school graduate. You're now 20 years old. You're a farmer. You have your own income. Why don't you help the illiterates twice a week, two hours every

time? Because by doing so, you also learn. So don't ask for an honorarium, because you're going to learn while you are teaching."

Recently, because of the high tutor dropout rate, there has been a policy shift away from a purely volunteer system. In some cases, those in authority might subtly pressure some citizens to tutor. But, more importantly, real incentives are being offered. Many of the tutors are elementary school teachers, and one incentive is to let them earn credits toward promotion by teaching illiteracy classes. The government also holds competitions and rewards the best tutors at the subdistrict, district, provincial, and national levels. Another incentive is to lend the tutors money, just as loans are offered to learners. In some but not all districts, tutors' associations have been formed and lent working capital.

"Some of them start a business," Dr. Napitupulu had said. "They grow peanuts, maybe. They sell that. The lazy ones lend the money [to others]. We don't give them an honorarium. They have to work, using the learning fund we give them." None of the tutors I talked to was a member of such an association, and all had only vague ideas about them. It seemed that this was a scheme that hadn't yet been really tested.

A young man with wild black hair, Nyoman Merdana, had been "selected" to volunteer as a tutor by the headman of Kayubihi, a hamlet near Bangli. On the wall of the headman's house was his portrait, painted by a friend from a photograph, next to a handsome clock. Outside in the heat, a dog barked continually.

Merdana had never heard of the tutors' associations, but they did exist on Bali, an official insisted. Merdana worked as an elementary school teacher in the mornings and led his volunteer literacy classes three afternoons a week. If there were ever funds to pay him, then of course he would want them. The government may decide, despite Dr. Napitupulu's commitment to volunteerism, that paying the tutors will become necessary at some time in the future, particularly as the basic literacy campaign gives way to more advanced teaching.

An enthusiastic tutor is the key to a successful literacy campaign, Jesper Morch, the UNICEF official in Jakarta, had agreed. But the majority of tutors weren't properly trained. They used rote instruction—getting the classes to repeat phrases over and over—and the teaching became merely a duty or an obligation. But he added, "It's beautiful to come across a tutor who really has a talent for teaching."

Raihan Syahrir was not an elementary school teacher by profession; her method was "just doing it my way." She stood barefooted in front of a class of five women in Mataram on the next island of Lombok, which we had reached by another short, smooth flight. The women sat crammed together on one bench. "As long as I'm needed, I'm willing to do this," she replied when I asked her her motive. Not surprisingly, all the tutors I questioned (whether privately or in a more public setting), gave similiar replies—they wanted to help the less fortunate and help the country.

Syahrir had left school at 17 and gone to work for a company in Mataram, selling insurance for two years. Then she had married her boss. The class giggled, appreciating the career move.

The insurance company wouldn't allow a married couple to work together, so she had to go to another company. She moved with her husband to Denpasar on Bali and stopped working when the children arrived. They now had six. Returning to Mataram in 1986, she had started volunteer work because she got bored.

Four of the women in the group were reticent, unwilling to say much about their progress, their lives, or why they turned up for the classes. The fifth—Mariana—was different. She had a sassy mouth and obviously liked an audience.

She was married at 15, she said, but her husband didn't give her any children. So she went off and married someone else. After again failing to become pregnant, she returned to husband number one. Still no children.

"So what's the next move?" I could'dn't resist asking.

Her eyes sparkled. She was willing, she said mischievously, to give a foreigner a shot at it. But in return she would expect a plane ticket to America.

Recruiting and Organizing

The *peniliks* have the job of recruiting the tutors, finding the illiterates (each *penilik* is supposed to persuade more than 500 new students to join up every year), administering the money, keeping everyone's morale up, taking part in ceremonies, and often traveling over vast areas. There are just under 3,000 *peniliks* in the project, watching over, on average, 80 learning groups each.

"Our *peniliks* work harder, much harder, than the *peniliks* in formal education," Dr. Napitupulu had told me. "Our" referred to the inspectors in the nonformal education sector, sometimes called out-of-school education. "Our *peniliks* go to the villages maybe in the evening, walk there probably, stay there to help the people." Yet they have a lower status, which Dr. Napitupulu believed to be all wrong. He held up his hand and pointed two fingers at me, one above the other. "This finger," he said, touching the one on top, "is the formal education *penilik*." The bottom one was the nonformal *penilik* and wasn't paid as much. Considering the inequities, it's not surprising that in some remote areas there are no *peniliks* at all.

Abdul Rachman, a *penilik* in Mataram, said that one incentive for *peniliks* is that they are given motorbikes for their work. He had actually heard of someone who refused a move into the formal education sector because he didn't want to give up his motorbike. The World Bank's third nonformal education loan will include provision for about 600 new motorbikes or small motorboats and about 40 vans.

Sometimes the area to be covered by the *penilik* is just too extensive. One *penilik* I met later in Bima, on the island of Sumbawa, had to look after 200 learning groups, and he could visit only about 30 a month. He had had a motorbike for the past two years, but before that he had to pay his own transport costs and usually used a pony and carriage. A *penilik* in Bima, an official said, made about 200,000 rupiahs ($100) a month and received only about 30,000 rupiahs

($15) to cover three months' travel costs. Professor Soedijarto, the man who has succeeded Dr. Napitupulu, told me later when I was back in Jakarta that he wanted to increase the number of *peniliks*, with more in districts outside Java.

A Question of Sight

I didn't notice Senip at first. She was sitting right at the back. The nine Sasak women had all put on black blouses and sarongs and had draped red sashes over their shoulders. They sat high on a shady platform out of the intense midday sun, waiting for our arrival.

We had come to the house and garden of two tutors, a husband and wife, in the village of Jelantik just outside Mataram on Lombok. The women spoke Sasak, which had to be translated into Bahasa Indonesia and then into English. It was a slow process, but there was much patience, much good humor, and much gentle courtesy.

The group had progressed to booklet A-10. Hadis admitted she found it all "very difficult." She was doing it, she said with a huge smile and rubbing her nose, because she "didn't want to be dumb." She liked coming to the tutors' house and garden to learn. If they held classes in their own homes, then their children, who were literate, would tease them.

Senip's eyes were her problem

Then I noticed Senip. She was much older than the others and seemed preoccupied. Would she mind telling us a little about herself? She came to the front of the group, clutching a booklet, and sat down. She also found the classes difficult. The problem was her eyes. She was sick when she was young and never could see well, although her distance vision was all right.

I passed her my glasses, bought two weeks earlier for $18 in a Washington, D.C., supermarket. Senip peered through the top half, which were darkened for protection against glare, and shook her head. Then she looked down at the booklet through the magnified lower half and brightened. A local official took off his rimless glasses, which seemed more powerful, and handed them to her. She put them on and smiled. They made her look venerable.

"She can't afford to see an eye doctor to get glasses," the official said.

"How much would she need?" asked Carla.

"About 30,000 rupiahs [$15]."

"Let's help her," said Carla. The money was rustled up and handed over to one of the officials. He would see that Senip had an eye examination and a pair of glasses.

Eye refraction problems—astigmatism, myopia, and presbyopia—may be the cause of much unnecessary frustration to students, causing both children and adults to drop out of classes. The majority of adults over 40 in the United States, after all, suffer from presbyopia, forcing them to wear reading glasses. In the developing world, simple eye tests during the first few classes can be quite easily organized, but the buying of expensive spectacles is a different matter.

A Mother and Son

We drove east behind a van that had an "I Love Islam" poster on the rear window, passing a number of sweat-soaked ponies hauling tiny carriages with as many as six passengers cramped together. We arrived at a turning where we parked and hiked a kilometer or two to the village of Barebali. It had been a long dry season, and the villagers hadn't been able to get enough water to their peanut and vegetable crops, the headman said. Nobody suffered real hunger. They had harvested and sold a tobacco crop, which needed less water.

It was cool and quiet under the high-roofed building where the entire village had gathered. The children, atten-

tive and well-behaved as children usually are in Southeast Asia, stood outside peering at the strangers.

Muslim, an older, dignified woman, was not overly deferential to the male officials and answered my questions openly and at some length. Did she remember when the Japanese were on Lombok? I asked.

"Yes, I was as small as that girl over there," she replied in Sasak, pointing to an 11- or 12-year-old child who squirmed with pleasure at being briefly in the spotlight.

When the Japanese soldiers came to Barebali, she said, they took the rice and everything else they wanted, including the young girls. To avoid that, she was married off to the elderly man in a brown turban who sat by her side. When the Japanese left, the Allied armies came.

"What about the independence struggle? Do you remember that?" I asked.

That had made much less of an impression on her, although she remembered that times were bad and her husband had to pawn his land to borrow money. When he received the cash, they noticed Sukarno's face on the bank notes—that was how they first learned about Indonesia's independence.

Economically, things were better today, she went on. They had electricity, clothes were easier to get, they had a cow, their children had gone to school. In fact, their eldest son had gone on to law school and was qualifying as a lawyer in Mataram. A daughter, who was brought forward from the back of the group, was in high school and also wanted to study at a university. Yes, both parents agreed, if that was what she wanted, then of course she should go.

Both Muslim and her husband were illiterate. He had been the most determined to learn to read and write and was making progress. She was "following his example."

Their volunteer tutor was a young elementary school teacher called Syarafuddin. He had lived in another village for seven years but had now returned.

"It's easier to teach the women than the men," he said, "because they're usually at home. The men are always out." Only rarely did the women in the village not come to classes.

"Is this one of your pupils?" I asked, indicating the woman sitting beside him.

"Yes," he said grinning. "She's my mother. Sarap. I use her as an example to attract others to come to my classes."

"Isn't it difficult," I asked Sarap, "after bringing up your son and teaching him about life, to accept him now as your teacher, even to let him tell you what to do? Was he an obedient kid?"

"Very obedient," she replied, with the loyalty of a mother who would never embarrass her children in public. "And he went to school even though he didn't have good clothes, even when his clothes were torn. I'm grateful to him now."

More of the Poorest of the Poor

The slum was the worst I had seen in Indonesia, certainly as bad as the slums I had visited over the years in Manila or Hanoi, in Rangoon or Calcutta, in Soweto or Lima. A group of Sasak families, who said they worked for Balinese landlords, lived in a series of shacks up an alleyway 3 kilometers outside Mataram. Like the people helped by Romo Mangun in Yogyakarta, these families had slipped through the cracks and sunk into dire poverty. But they were getting help and support from ANNISA, a legally registered women's cooperative in Mataram.

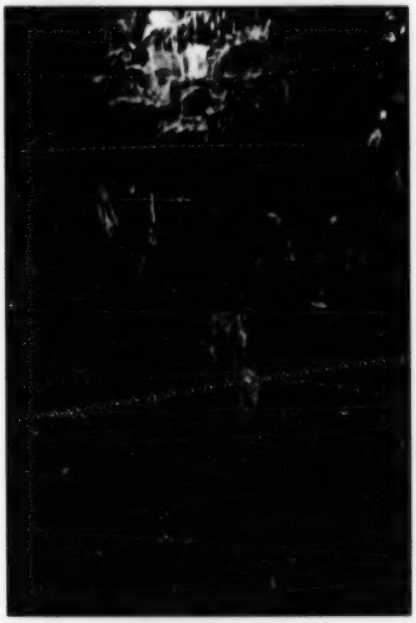
Children spilled out of the shacks and gaped. One knelt in front of his mother and sucked at each breast in turn. Rice was pushed continually into the mouth of another child. A third scratched at ugly scabs on her head. Kasmiati, the cooperative's director, warmly greeted Parman, a widow who had no idea how old she was and who had lost five of her ten children. The cooperative was lending her small amounts of money to prepare and sell snacks made from cassava and maize. She found it so difficult to learn to read, she said.

The cooperative had also helped provide the families with money to build a communal well in the alleyway. The men in the slum had built it themselves; it was deep and constantly in use. Two women winched up the pail, filled their

pots, and carried them away on their heads. Before the well was built, they had washed in the stinking drainwater that flowed in a gulley outside.

"Teaching people who lack even basic knowledge requires alternative methods," said Kasmiati. Coming from the south of Lombok where the soil is poor, she had overcome many disadvantages, become a teacher, and made it her life's work to raise living standards for Sasak women. "We first look at what they need, and then move on to literacy," she explained. On one occasion, for example, everybody was sick from the dirty drainwater. They agreed to talk about it. This was an opportunity to discuss health and sanitation, and from there, with the help of drawings, they went on to reading and writing lessons. "We try to befriend the people first and help with their family problems," she emphasized. "What's important to illiterate women is to have something to eat. When that's taken care of, then you can turn your attention to the necessity of learning."

Taking care of basic needs first



"Package A isn't as appropriate as it could be, because it's using experiences and cultural references which are particularly Javanese," said Mary Ann Brocklesby, a British volunteer worker who had spent three years with the cooperative. "It's appropriate for Java but not this island. The way market women are in Java, for example, is different from how market women are in Lombok." This suggestion of too much Javanese influence is commonly heard when one travels outside that island. Jakarta officials reply by pointing out that there are Package A booklets called "Customs in

Sulawesi," "Customs in Kalimantan," and "Customs in Nusa Tenggara" (of which Lombok is a part). And, of course, Java matters because two-thirds of all Indonesians live on Java.

A Struggle Simply to Survive

The ANNISA cooperative helps the poorest of the poor among Indonesian women. In many other parts of the world, particularly South Asia, these women are more numerous and have a greater struggle. It begins with a fight to survive birth and infancy.

Lawrence Summers, when he was the World Bank's chief economist, went to Pakistan in January 1992 and delivered a tough speech on how countries should invest in all their people, concluding that educating girls might possibly yield a higher rate of return than any other investment in the developing world. Instead, many developing countries treat women as a liability. Whereas females are 51 percent of the population in the industrial world, they are only 48.1 percent in India and 47.6 percent in Pakistan. The evidence suggests that boys are fed better, have fewer chores inside and outside the home, and get more attention when they are ill. And modern technology now enables parents who want a boy to abort a female fetus.

Amartya Sen, professor of economics and philosophy at Harvard University, has calculated that more than 100 million women worldwide are simply "missing" because of this neglect of women and girls. While census bias and migration patterns may account in part for the lower percentages of women in developing countries, the overwhelming reason is excess mortality. Sen describes the fate of these women as "one of the more momentous problems facing the contemporary world."

Girls are trapped in a "continuous circle of neglect," Lawrence Summers argued, because parents expect little from them except to serve their husbands. An effective way to break the circle is to spend money on women's education, which is relatively inexpensive compared with other

development investments and has the potential to transform society. Educating women boosts their wages and means smaller and healthier families and better chances that the next generation can escape poverty and misery. Moreover, many people would argue that educating women and men equally is simply a basic, unarguable human right.

Keeping Girls in School

In many countries, the aims are more modest than Indonesia's large-scale approach to literacy. But most countries are trying to increase female enrollment and keep girls in school. Building schools closer to students' homes has helped, as have flexible hours that allow girls to do home chores, teachers who attend their classes regularly, more female teachers, more science-based curricula, textbooks with no gender bias, and scholarships, according to Barbara Herz, a World Bank economist who has worked extensively on women's development. Many parents consider female education a luxury they can't afford, so "we have to make the option as appealing as possible. Where it's tough, such as Bangladesh, there have to be incentives to tip the balance."

A World Bank–assisted project in Bangladesh aims to build 200 satellite schools closer to the girls' homes. The Dhaka government will recruit three female teachers for every two male teachers and continue a successful scholarship program. In Morocco, similarly, there are plans for 250 new middle schools in certain rural areas. In Nepal the quality of schools is poor, enrollment and retention rates for girls are among the lowest in the world, and the Nepalese prefer sending their daughters to female teachers. So the emphasis there is on training more female teachers so that more girls enroll in school and stay the course.

Adult literacy classes also must be near the women's homes, said Nelly Stromquist, an associate professor at the University of Southern California and a literacy expert. This is a lesson that Brazil, Indonesia, and South Asian countries have learned. Stromquist is involved with a São Paulo

project in which the city government, starting in 1989, paid teachers to go door to door to find illiterates and then teach them in community centers or churches. There are similar but smaller projects in Santos and Rio de Janeiro. "Women are not specially targeted," she said, "but the majority [of participants] are women—maybe because women are less reluctant to admit they have problems."

Most of the Brazilian women in the classes are between 23 and 74 years old, and some bring their children along. Stromquist found out that all the women live within a 5- to 15-minute walk of the centers. They won't come greater distances because they are afraid of what might happen to them at night or what might happen to their children. "The gains are going to be modest," she said, "but we have to continue. We can't do nothing. The female literacy rate is improving in Brazil, but at a slow pace."

Two Literate Businesswomen

The rough track out of Bima soon collapsed into potholes. From the crests of the hills, the views were of great sweeps of the inlet, which cuts southward into the island of Sumbawa. There were undisturbed, crescent-shaped bays fringed with palm trees. Between the track and the beach was dense foliage, cut through here and there by pathways leading to bamboo huts. Plump cows with bells round their necks chewed by the side of the road.

We passed a flock of goats herded by a young woman with a straight back who held her head high and flashed a dazzling smile. A pony and carriage strained to pull four passengers with their load. Farther on, two girls played in the mud on the beach. A small hotel and restaurant were being built at the end of a spit of land. Few tourists come to Bima, except maybe as a stopover on their way to Sape on the east coast. There they can take a ferry to the neighboring island of Komodo and see the Komodo dragons—the giant lizards that sometimes grow to 10 feet in length and weigh more than 300 pounds.

In this part of Sumbawa, the people are devout Muslims who make their living mainly by farming and fishing. The Dikmas official, Zakaria Mahmud, said he had to make extra money because he had eight children. With their help he grew rice in the wet season and soybeans in the dry season, and he also had a number of fish ponds; he was able, though, to hire farm workers to do the really hard labor.

We stopped later at a fruit stall by the side of the road to talk to the proprietor, a middle-aged woman with eight children. She, like the woman in Barebali on Lombok, remembered the Japanese soldiers. The local people had to flee up into those hills, she said, pointing to the summit of a hill that sloped up directly in front of us, and they had worn old clothes so as not to attract attention.

Two of her daughters had finished high school but couldn't find work. She nodded behind her. The daughters were sitting at a table on the beach, playing cards and laughing with some young men. Business was not bad; she and two other women together earned about 25,000 rupiahs ($12.50) a day. Her husband was away at sea in his fishing boat, and when he returned they could make between 15,000 and 20,000 rupiahs ($7.50–$10) selling the catch. She had dropped out of primary school, but she could read and write. There were reading classes at one time in the village, she said, adding dismissively: "But Package A is only for illiterates."

Despite limited schooling, the fruit seller was literate

Others in Bima seemed to regret the lapse of classes. Ramlah Yunus was also literate—an unmarried successful businesswoman who employed ten female weavers in a workshop. She told me that her father was blind and couldn't support the family when she was young, so it was her mother who earned an income through weaving and

selling snacks. Her greatest wish was to save enough money to send her mother on the hajj—the pilgrimage to Mecca. There had been one Package A class in the neighborhood, Yunus said, but that had now finished, and no one was trying to start another. "Most women are too busy with the children and cooking," she explained, "and the men are too ashamed to say they are illiterate."

Two weavers sat at their looms on the floor. Siti Hawa, 37, was illiterate and wore a T-shirt with the faded words "Four Seasons" on the front. One of her teenage daughters, Rosdiana, came in and took over the weaving from her mother; she was working to pay her own school fees.

At the other loom, working diligently, was 13-year-old Fauwzia. She was self-possessed and practical.

"What are you going to be when you leave school?" I asked.

"A nurse."

"Why?"

"Because you can start right away. It's easy to get a letter of appointment."

Fauwzia was an avid reader but complained that she could never find enough material to read.

"What would you like to read about?"

"Things about a lake in West Java" that she had heard stories about, she replied. "How it came to be there. And about people in history."

Too Few Books

There's a lack of printed material in Indonesia, a foreign expert on book publishing told me in Jakarta after I flew back from Sumbawa. The publishing industry is inadequate; one has only to compare the figures with those for neighboring countries. In 1989 Indonesia published a mere 8 new titles per million inhabitants, compared to Malaysia's 203. There are about 310 publishers, but only 20 percent of these produce more than 15 titles a year. Bookstores number about 600, but most are poorly stocked because they have to pay outright

for books and have little opportunity to return unsold volumes.

The reason given for this dearth of reading material is that Indonesia has an oral tradition, and reading is not naturally part of the culture. Certainly there's a tradition of listening to the recitation of stories. Certainly many of the distinct ethnic groups also prize puppetry, dance, sculpture, music, or painting as a way of communicating their culture, but there are also rich literary traditions in the various Indonesian languages. The Javanese, for example, look back proudly to the reign of Airlangga in the eleventh century, which saw an outburst of literary activity, notably the poem *Arjunavivaha*.

It was claimed that poor people wouldn't buy reading material because they saw it as a luxury, the foreign expert added. But magazines—some of which are of high quality and fairly expensive—are widely read. The expert believed that more of the poor might, if given the opportunity, make magazines or even books a part of their budget. A plentiful supply of attractive-looking and interesting reading material is essential in teaching literacy and preventing people from slipping back into illiteracy. Dikmas's answer to this is a plan to increase the number of community reading centers—simple local libraries.

The Greatest Motivator

One question for Dr. Napitupulu had been on my mind for some time. How did he get the name "Washington"?

It was the custom in North Sumatra for the oldest child to give a name to the newborn child, he explained. His older sister was studying American history when he came rolling into the world, so she picked out "George Washington." The only problem was that she couldn't say "George" properly. In Batak, it just didn't come out sounding right. So he was dubbed simply "Washington." However, he added, "when I became director-general

here, one minister always called me 'George.' He used to shout: 'Hey, George. Come here.'"

During our conversation, Dr. Napitupulu's mother was never far from his mind. "When I went to America to study, my mother said, 'Do they speak Batak there?' Her world was only that."

She may have been illiterate, Dr. Napitupulu continued, but "she was the greatest motivator. Not only for me to study, but also for me to launch this literacy program." That was fortunate for him—and for Indonesia.

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50

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